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ABSTRACT

The role of achievement needs in self-evaluation has been relatively neglected. To examine ability evaluation through social comparison when achievement or self-esteem needs are salient, students (N=102) were given bogus (favorable or unfavorable) ability feedback to manipulate the need for self-esteem maintenance. Achievement motivation was invoked by varying subjects' expectation that they would or would not participate in a group task and be evaluated on social sensitivity by group members. A third level had no expectation of a subsequent task. Subjects then selected a packet of social sensitivity scores and a personality profile of a previously tested subject, choosing one whose score was near the top, better than theirs, just above theirs, below or much below theirs, or near the bottom. Social comparison measures after the feedback and before the group task indicated the strength of the various motivations. Subjects who expected to be evaluated by others chose top level comparison others. Findings also partly replicated the self-esteem maintaining effect of downward comparison following negative feedback. However, use of downward comparison was limited to a situation where future performance demands were low. (JAC)

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ACHIEVEMENT AND SELF ESTEEM IMPLICATIONS OF SELF PRESENTATION

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Achievement and Self Esteem Implications of Self Presentation

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Ability evaluation through social comparison was examined when achievement or self esteem needs were salient. Expectation of self presentation in a group setting was considered an achievement demand which would result in upward comparison, particularly to top performers. Receiving unfavorable feedback was construed as a situation invoking self esteem maintenance, resulting in downward comparison. These predictions were supported. In addition, high self presentation interacted with favorability by blocking the tendency to compare downward after unfavorable feedback. Self presentation also interacted with prior self esteem score in that the lowest self esteem group was most affected by self presentation expectation.

Problem:

While information and self esteem needs in self evaluation have recently been compared (Trope, 1982; Sachs, 1982), the role of achievement needs in self evaluation has been relatively neglected. In a social comparison framework, achievement motivation, or a concern with attaining future good performance, can be expressed through comparison with high achievers. Social comparison also taps other motivations for ability evaluation by equating downward comparison with self esteem maintenance (Hakmiller, 1966; Friend & Gilbert, 1973; Wills, 1981) and comparison with similar others to information needs, or need to reduce uncertainty (Wheeler, 1966).

Situations which invoke an achievement need include the expectation of a decision based on ability evaluation (Jones & Regan, 1974) and high motivation for success (Wheeler, 1966). In these situations, attaining information about one's own ability level is less important than learning about the performance of top scorers. Learning about top levels of performance can help the individual pattern his/her behavior in kind, increasing the individual's chances of success.

It is also argued here that the expectation of self presentation is an achievement related situation which would result in comparison to standard setters. The anticipation of self presentation encompasses two of the situations where achievement related needs are salient; where the information would be instrumental in success on a later task and where motivation to succeed is high. First, evaluative information is instrumental in self presentation since the performance

should be more effective when the individual has information about high performance levels. And second, motivation for success in self presentation is high because of the multitude of instrumental uses of self presentation (e.g., ingratiation, intimidation) (Jones & Pittman, 1979). Extending Festinger's (1954) uni-directional upward drive hypothesis, not only do we wish to perform well relative to others, we also wish others to see us performing well. A self presentation condition focuses attention on our performance by implying that others will be observing and appraising our behavior.

In the present study, subjects were given bogus favorable or unfavorable ability feedback to manipulate the need for self esteem maintenance. Achievement motivation was invoked by varying the subjects' expectation of a subsequent task. Subjects expected to either participate in a group task which involved evaluation of their performance by the other members or involved no evaluation. A third level had no expectation of a subsequent task.

Social comparison measures taken after the feedback and before the expected group task, were intended to show the relative strength of the various motivations in each situation.

It was predicted that unfavorable feedback would result in downward comparison when self presentation expectation (achievement demand) was low. High self presentation demands were expected to result in comparison to the top ranks even when feedback was unfavorable, since present self esteem needs would be sacrificed to ensure future good performance and future self esteem (Jones & Regan, 1973). This tendency

would also be strongest for low self esteem individuals (Jones, 1973).

In sum, this study attempted to identify a particular situation, self presentation, as one which invokes achievement motivation and a self esteem maintaining component associated with achievement related bahavior in this area.

Subjects:

One hundred two undergraduates were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 x 3 factorial design with favorability of feedback (favorable vs. unfavorable) and expectation of group task requirements (high self presentation vs. low self presentation vs. no group expectation) determining the conditions.

Procedure:

The cover story stated that the experimenter was studying performance on a particular ability based on personality characteristics. The purported ability, social sensitivity, was described as a measure of "how sensitive a person is to other people, how good one is at picking up what others are feeling in a situation".

While the subjects completed the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (1965), the experimenter supposedly scored the bogus Multiphasic Social Sensitivity Inventory which the subjects had just completed. The latter instrument, was composed of 20 questions selected from the MMPI. Subjects were then shown a score sheet with either favorable (70th percentile) or unfavorable (30th percentile) feedback on their social sensitivity test score.

The group ability task was then explained to the group subjects. High self presentation subjects were told they were to participate in a group task of social sensitivity after which the group would secretly vote to select the most socially sensitive member. Low self presentation subjects received the same description omitting reference to a group vote.

All subjects were then told that they would have the opportunity to select and look at a score packet composed of the social sensitivity score and personality profile of one of the previously tested subjects. They made a first and second choice of score packet, selecting a person whose score was either "near the top score, much better than mine, just above mine, just below mine, much below mine, or near the bottom".

Results:

Manipulation checks on the favorability of the feedback indicate that unfavorable feedback subjects rated their scores as poorer and their score satisfaction as lower than subjects who received favorable feedback.

A check on the interpretation of the dependent measure showed that subjects rated the top score as most informative in preparing for the group task; the level just above oneself as most informative about one's ability; and the bottom score as best for making one feel better about one's score.

Analysis of the first choice of comparison other found a significant effect of self presentation, $F(2,96)=4.84$, $p<.01$, such that the highest level of self presentation resulted in

a significantly lower level of comparison other than in any other cell. Log linear analysis of the frequency of choosing the top choice level on the first choice showed a significant effect of level of self presentation, partial $X^2=7.04$, $p<.05$. (See Tables 1 and 2.)

Since the second choice was limited by the selection made for the first choice, its effects were analyzed only as they contributed to the subjects' total choice score. Analysis of total choice scores showed a significant effect of favorability, $F(1,96)=7.91$, $p<.01$, and an interaction of favorability and self presentation, $F(2,96)=3.91$, $p<.05$. (See Table 3.) A post hoc LSD test of the interaction showed two discrepant cells. The cells with unfavorable feedback and low self presentation expectation or no group expectation showed subjects choosing comparison others of lower standing. As on the analysis of the first choice, high self presentation blocked the effects of unfavorable feedback.

Selection of the extreme quarters of the self esteem scores was used to create a 2 x 2 x 3 analysis. Analysis of this design found a self presentation by favorability interaction, $F(1,34)=7.91$, $p<.01$. (See Table 4.) A post hoc LSD test showed significant differences between levels of self presentation only when self esteem levels were low.

Discussion:

The results of the present study support the hypothesis of self presentation expectation as an achievement demand. Subjects who expected to be evaluated by others chose top

level comparison others to a significantly greater degree than did subjects who did not anticipate evaluation. This choice level was also rated by the subjects as best for preparing for the group task, thus underlining its association with concerns about high performance.

These findings also in part replicate the self esteem maintaining effect of downward comparison following a threat, such as negative feedback. However, the use of downward comparison was found to be limited to a situation where future performance demands were low. High self presentation expectation was found to block esteem saving downward comparison which typically follows negative feedback.

Upward comparison after negative feedback, although it is likely to result in present damage to self esteem, actually safeguards future self esteem by increasing an individual's chances of future success. This relationship of future self esteem needs and achievement motivation is also supported by the finding that level of self presentation significantly affected the comparison choice of the individuals with the lowest self esteem, but had no effect on those in the highest self esteem category.

The present research, besides identifying self presentation as an achievement demand, demonstrates an interrelationship of achievement and self esteem concerns. Upward comparison was shown to be related to both achievement and self esteem needs, which previously had only been associated with downward comparison. Future research should attempt to extend these

interactive findings beyond the social comparison paradigm to other means of study of ability evaluation. In addition, the factor of personal relevance of an ability should also be investigated to determine its effect on self esteem and achievement issues.

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Table 1

Effects of Favorability of Feedback

and Self Presentation Level

on Mean Comparison Choice* on First Comparison

Level of Self Presentation	Feedback Type		
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Marginals
High	1.76	1.65	1.71[m]
Low	2.29	2.24	2.27
None	2.00	3.24[c]	2.62

Note: * Choice rated as: 1=compare to person near top
6=compare to person near bottom

c Interaction cell significantly different from other 5 cells.

m Marginal significantly different from other marginals.

Table 2

Effects of Favorability of Feedback

and Self Presentation Level

on Frequency of Comparison to Top Rank on First Choice

Level of Self Presentation	Feedback Type		Marginals
	Favorable	Unfavorable	
High	9(53%)	9(53%)	18(53%)[a]
Low	5(29%)	4(24%)	9(27%)
None	8(47%)	1(7%)	9(27%)

Note: Cell data entered as frequency (percent of cell total).

a Marginal significantly different from other marginals.

Table 3

Effects of Favorability of Feedback
and Self Presentation Level
on Mean Total Comparison Choice

Level of Self Presentation	Feedback Type	
	Favorable	Unfavorable
High	5.18	5.12
Low	5.47	6.24[a]
None	4.48	7.35[a]
Marginals	5.18	6.24

Note: Total comparison choice based on sum of first and second comparison choices, each rated: 1= near top; 6= near bottom.

a Interaction cells significantly different from other 4 cells.

Table 4

Effects of Self Presentation Level

on Mean Total Comparison Choice

for Extreme Quarters of Self Esteem Continuum

Level of Self Presentation	Self Esteem Score Level	
	Top Quarter	Bottom Quarter
High	5.90 (10)	4.55 (11)[a]
Low	5.50 (8)	6.40 (5)
None	4.67 (6)[a]	8.67 (6)[b]

Note: Number in parentheses is cell size.

Total comparison choice based on sum of first and second comparison choices, each rated: 1=near top; 6=near bottom.

Interaction cell marked "b" is significantly different from cells marked "a".